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MANJU KAPUR'S CUSTODY: THE REALITY BEHIND PLATONIC LOVE AND ROMANTIC LOVE IN MARRIAGE

Abstract:

Manju Kapur, the leading novelist in Indian English Literature is acknowledged for highlighting the life of middle class Indian erudite married women in all her novels. Her works lit the importance of human values through various family set up. The novels serve the most powerful expression of couples notions and passions in married life. In all her stories the theme marriage plays the role of key to picture the changes in Indian marriage tradition. The novel *Custody* also focuses on modern family life style of 21st century. It suggests the valuable point that "Love is much more than sex though it is the biological foundation between a male and female". The chosen topic pinpoints how far platonic love and romantic love is necessary for successful married life through the pairs Raman and Shagun, Ashok and Shagun, Ishita and Suryakanta and Raman and Ishita. The article denotes an idealistic view "Life becomes easier and happier if one gets right mate, but if not, the life will become a nightmare". Besides, in the contemporary society the couples have to understand that not only sexual love but also spiritual love is more important for ultimate success in married life.

Keywords: Attitude, Platonic, Romantic, Trauma, Reality, Marriage

Marriage is one of the most important events in life. Marriage will be bed of roses for those who understand and compromise in their life. But at present it is too rare to hear about happy and long lasting married life. In our day to day life, one can heed and witness various complaints about marriage, even attempting suicide over broken marriage, divorce, extra marital affairs and in some extreme cases husband kills wife or wife kills the children or husband to fulfil their own sexual and other pleasurable needs. Each one has to understand that marriage and problems are interlinked. When people enter their married life they will be in situation to face unexpected problems, so they should hold responsibilities to manage the situations and to get victory in life.

Manju Kapur's *Custody* also reveals such reality of modern day married couples mentality about nuptial life in Delhi metropolitan. The life of Raman and Shagun paves a lesson to all divorcees. The main marital discord is lack of understanding, failure in building love relationship in sharing and trusting the life partner. Such lacking collapses the life of Raman and Shagun. Raman who works in 'The Brand', a leading soft drinks manufacturing company as an advertising manager leads a decent comfortable life with his dazzling wife Shagun and smart son Arjun and lovable little daughter Roohi. In the beginning, their married life was sweet, but as the years passed and when Raman started to concentrate mainly in official duties the elements in conjugal life led to friction, jealous, anger and enmity in their soul. Shagun expected for more romance, extravagance and liberty from her husband but he failed to ponder on her needs. When her expectations were unfulfilled she finds some other source for happiness in life. Further, she also desired to be a model and it was actually her long time goal to step into modelling field. Even her modelling idea was not motivated by her husband and she started to implant negative feelings against Raman.

Shagun being educated never preferred to sit within the enclosed walls at her house as it created traumatic problems to her. When she expressed her feelings to Raman he never

took it serious and advised her to take care of their children. Initially man and woman need the comfort of each other during the time of mental stress and monotonous work. One can feel more secured and happy if the other willingly shares and overcomes the burdens together. Shagun did all the work alone and her husband never appreciated and admired her as in the beginning of their marriage. The romantic love slowly faded away between them and life become monotonous with daily activities. Later, her life totally changed when Ashok Khanna, the dashing boss of Raman fell in love at first sight with her. Raman no longer affords to live freely because of too many responsibilities. So, Shagun falls easily in the trap of Ashok Khanna's romantic love and engages in illegal marital affairs. When Raman fails to shower his romantic love, the evergreen life of them gets twist and collapses the life of their children. The children become the victims at end of the broken married life. On one side, Raman and Shagun's life comes to end due to the absence of romantic love, but on the other side of life Ashok and Shagun leads together without any guilty sensation because their life is fulfilled and successful due to the presence of romantic love. They share and enjoy the love as Edmund Spenser expresses the beautiful love verses in his "Fowre Hymnes":

"For love is a celestial harmony
Of likely hearts compos'd of stars' concent,
Which join together in sweet sympathy,
To work each other's joy and true content,
Which they have harbour'd since their first descent
Out of their heavenly bowers, where they did see
And know each other here belov'd to be." (197-203)

Ashok and Shagun start to lead their life abandoning all the events that happened around them. Their life expresses only the want of sexual love in marriage. Ashok praises her

as Goddess beauty and it is all a flattery to fulfil his sexual pleasures. But like a fool she believes the flattery words and surrenders her body to him. She forgets to understand the reality in marriage life. After marriage, there will be nothing interesting between the couple. Two people living together all the time and sharing everything results in boredom of life. It is nature. One cannot give anyone a lot of time. Everyone needs an individual space. As everyone has a different nature, it causes fight and leads to declining of love. In reality, all should understand that the trouble is unavoidable and melancholy is optional. So, we must have positive attitude for success in life. But the attitude of Shagun disclosed gloomy reactions and quickly responded to the love of the guest as Simon de Beauvoir explained in *The Second Sex*: “The woman in love is shut off in her lover’s universe; jealousy increases her isolation and thereby narrows her dependence. It relieves her ennui; however, keeping a husband is work but keeping a lover is a kind of sacred ministry” (674).

Shagun fails her duty as an Indian family woman, wife and mother. She modifies her life according to the taste of modernity and western culture. She realises her life is over the moon when she enjoys with Ashok in New York. She preferred permanently such romantic love and life. When she was alone, she blamed Raman was unable to provide such love and only so her attitude changed to select Ashok as her second partner. Her happiness was well reflected in her letter to her mother:

Sometimes I feel so happy mama, I wonder how I am among the lucky ones
...Everybody was screaming and dancing-Ashok and I danced too, he said he
would never have gone to such a tam Astha if it hadn’t been for me... He says
I have given him a new lease of life that now is the time for him to cash in on
years of dedication to the company. (C 284-285)

The life of Raman and Shagun ends in divorce and fights for custody of their children Arun and Roohi. Thus it is crystal clear that Raman and Shagun's life is unsuccessful because of the non-caring and apathetic attitude in conjugal relationship. If Raman had understood romance is one of the most essential elements to happiness in married relationships he would have got success in life. Many partners do not actually recognize what romance is and how to execute it. As well, the couples have to understand sexual love is not only the love for success in married life but also the spiritual love of understanding the soul of the mates is more important.

Similar to Raman and Shagun's life *Custody* excessively presents the realistic, romantic and pathetic condition of Ishita and Suryakanta; the second important couples married life. She is contrast in character to Shagun. She believes in traditional marriage and wants to go over a peaceful life with her husband Suryakanta. She has the intention to attain happiness and freedom through family values. But, the destiny fills only bareness and detachment in existence of her marriage life. She surmounts many hurdles to get liberty from her severity life. As a dutiful wife she expresses her divine love to her husband and family members but her inability to beget a child changes her life. Ishita's mother-in-law throws her out when she learns that her daughter-in-law is an infertile woman. The entire family including her husband started to treat her as 'other' being. So, her married life ends only due to the presence of sexual or bodily love and lack of platonic love.

The life of Suryakanta and Ishita proves an authentic evidence that in married relationships actions are very important than emotions. When one takes positive actions instead of negative emotions, they can experience the success and have influence on their spouse. But such things are absent in the life of Ishita and Suryakanta. From the beginning of her married life physical and mental stress persecutes her. Ishita's life is the reflection and

shadow of many infertile women in the society. Her internal feelings outburst at the hospital when she considers her life as:

Smaller than the ants on the ground, smaller than the motes of the dust in the sunlit air, smaller than the drops of dew caught between blades of grass in the morning was Ishita as she sat in the gynaecologist's office with her mother-in-law, watching as the doctor sketched out the messages concealed in her body. Here were the tubes, here the eggs, here was where conception occurred. The loss of normal anatomy meant fertilisation could not take place without intervention. (C 65)

It is evident to understand how as a barren woman Ishita is not recognized as an equal being by her identical women community. Ishita's connubial life with Suryakanta curls and infertility interrupts the tender and affectionate relationship between the couple. Even after persistent ordeal, she under no circumstances steps out of her married life. But the family members and her husband consider her as a useless figure and forces for divorce. Atlast, Ishita observes total elimination in life instead of love around her. As a sophisticated woman, Ishita also accepts for divorce and daringly exposes a simple fact:

I can't go home, I can't stay here. Just make it possible for our parents to settle, and then I shall get out of your life forever. I will agree to divorce by mutual content, otherwise you know how long that can take. I need to live with dignity. For the sake of the love you once had for me. (C 73)

Initially, split in married life with Suryakanta brings many problems and lessons to Ishita. She prepares her life in doing social service and becomes a challenging and hopeful woman. Her fortuitous meeting with Raman helps her to find the motive of the divorce and it bridges the bondage of relationship between the broken hearts. Later, their spiritual bondage

ends up in marriage. Ishita who has only seen the negative part of the married life spell bounds in joy with liberty in Raman's relationship. Ishita submits her motherly love on Roohi, a motherless and abandoned girl. Though Raman is the second partner to Ishita, she experiences heavenly pleasure and sacrifices her life to attain the spirituality in service. After her second marriage she utters:

Even if the relationship were to end tonight she would still be richer. Not to mention all the love she received from Roohi. She thought of the little arms around her neck, her weight on her lap, the smell of the breath, the smooth pink lips glistening with a silver of drool, the baby-white teeth. For those moments in the car she had allowed herself to feel she was the child's mother, with an intimate connection to the man sitting next to her. (C 293)

Raman also experiences the similar sense of reaction, and feels satisfied and happy in the company of Ishita which he never felt with Shagun. Raman and Ishita's love stand as the most powerful tool in the world for good. God helped them to get united to learn principle of reality in life. The problem for many couples is that they have thought of love as a romantic emotion. In reality, love is also a divine attitude explained with appropriate behaviour. Their love and marriage get success as their love is of platonic love which had nothing to do with crude or carnal lusts. Even Plato defined platonic love as the kind of love that stimulates us to become enhanced versions of ourselves, stirring us to follow superior goals, and bringing us more rapidly to enlightenment or the divine. The life of Raman and Ishita flashes the words of Edward Carpenter who in his text *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* explains:

“[A]s people are beginning to see that the sexes form in a certain sense a continuous group, so they are beginning to see that Love and Friendship which have been so often

set apart from each other as things distinct are in reality closely related and shade imperceptibly into each other. Women are beginning to demand that Marriage shall mean Friendship as well as Passion; that a comrade-like Equality shall be included in the word Love; and it is recognised that from the one extreme of a 'Platonic' friendship (generally between persons of the same sex) up to the other extreme of passionate love (generally between persons of opposite sex) no hard and fast line can at any point be drawn effectively separating the different kinds of attachment. We know, in fact, of Friendships so romantic in sentiment that they verge into love; we know of Loves so intellectual and spiritual that they hardly dwell in the sphere of Passion.”

In the battle between romantic love and platonic love, the protagonists who were once admiring and over-sentimental, at last make realistic recognition. As a stable and devoted woman Ishita considers her contentment and self-determination rests in being good wife to Raman and as a cherished mother to sweet heart Roohi. Whereas, Shagun regards absolute life and enjoyment with Ashok shapes her life. The life of Raman and Ishita proves that platonic love too can make married life success. They prudently have learned to approach problems differently to get different results. As in life of Raman and Ishita, everyone should recognise that the trivial changes in approach, attitude and actions make the biggest difference in marriage.

Thus *Custody* is entirely an account of Indian modern couples' different married life style which gets success and failure behind various facts, incidents, frictions and reality of romantic and platonic love. The article exhibits how the couples are mounting in married life of modern Indian society. Further, it delineates the point though everybody has some expectations and crises, every life is beautiful. Altogether, romance and platonic love are the most crucial elements of happiness in relationships of the married life.

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